

## 2006 Showcase in Excellence Awards Recipient Arizona Department of Transportation Office of Environmental Services



### Company Information:

#### *Highest Ranking Official:*

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Services

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*Type of work:* The Office of Environmental Services (OES) is a new office in ADOT that oversees all environmental programs within the agency. The OES will insure that local, state, and federal environmental laws are complied with during the development, construction, and operation of ADOT facilities.

*Workforce:* 5,000

### Testimonial of Value of Arizona State Quality Awards Program

“As a lead agency, our organization is looking to the future with a proactive approach to addressing habitat connectivity concerns. This process has allowed us to see how far we have come and at the same time how far we have to go. “

-Todd Williams, Director, Office of Environmental Services

### Highlights of Organizational Process:

#### Processes:

- The Arizona Wildlife Linkages Workgroup (AWLW) is a collaborative effort formed by the Arizona Department of Transportation, Arizona Game and Fish Department, Bureau of Land Management, Federal Highway Administration, Northern Arizona University, Sky Island Alliance, USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Wildlands Project to address habitat fragmentation through a comprehensive, systematic approach.
- Through this partnership and commitment, a series of successful statewide workshops were conducted in order to facilitate "buy-in" to the process and gather information from local experts to identify: 1) large blocks of protected habitat; 2) wildlife movement corridors (potential linkage zones) between as well as through them; and 3) factors threatening to disrupt such linkage zones.
- In December 2006, after several years of refinement, the AWLW has produced the Arizona's Wildlife Linkages Assessment along with a map to graphically display the areas of concern. AWLW expanded upon the original workshop information and has worked to further define existing conditions, record biotic communities, list species that depend on particular linkages, identify land ownership within those linkages, and detail anticipated in addition to known threats. Currently, more than 150 potential linkage zones have been identified throughout Arizona.

#### Processes (continued):

- The AWLW is working to integrate and incorporate wildlife concerns and habitat connectivity needs into the forefront of transportation and regional planning processes to address habitat fragmentation due to highways and other human development. Consideration of structured, coordinated data and information on habitat linkages early in the design process helps to produce results that comply with regulatory, budgetary and timeframe constraints and provides a statewide emphasis on inter and intra-agency coordination and partnerships. The process results in evidence-based habitat linkages and recognizes opportunities to accommodate wildlife movement and maintain links between habitat areas or to repair links between fragmented areas.
- The collaborative process has looked at innovative ways to accommodate wildlife and habitat connectivity in Arizona. It employs scientific means of data collection through research, examining national and international studies and new technology-based data collection methods to study movement patterns and habitat connectivity.
- The process has a focus on the future and management by fact, as it moves beyond meeting legal requirements to innovatively improve outcomes and to do so efficiently, cost effectively and in a timely manner. Addressing each potential barrier one-at-a-time is expensive and inefficient. In each landscape, we must address all these factors concurrently to successfully maintain or restore linkages between habitats and conserve the wildlife and natural ecosystems that Arizona's residents and visitors rely on and benefit from.
- These key process requirements demonstrate a commitment to proactive support and protection of ecosystems while addressing the challenge of developing wildlife permeable transportation corridors.
- Additional analysis and development of site-specific linkage designs is underway to further refine the potential linkage zones. In most cases, only a fraction of the land in a potential linkage zone will need to be conserved. To date, eight have been completed. Each linkage design includes a map of critical land to be conserved, recommendations for structures to facilitate wildlife crossing of roads, railroads, canals, and other human caused barriers, and management recommendations for multiple-use landscapes.
- This was only the first step in a continuing process of defining and elevating the awareness of critical habitat connectivity areas. Substantial work has begun on identifying and mapping additional linkage zones within habitat blocks. It is anticipated that this will double the current number of linkage zones. As new linkage zones are added, road construction programs are updated and development in the State progresses, this evaluation and resulting prioritization will be revised and updates issued.

#### Quality and Performance Results:

- Even prior to official release, statewide planners have been utilizing this Assessment for projects including bond initiative development, regional growth concerns and transportation project development.
- The Assessment provides a starting point for detailed consultation and coordination by providing a common reference point. With early consideration, the opportunity is created to resolve environmental issues pertaining to wildlife connectivity and wildlife-vehicle collisions while reducing project development costs.
- Furthermore, the formation of the AWLW has facilitated discussions and partnerships to help ensure a unified approach to wildlife linkage preservation and management while reinforcing the commitment and efficiency of wildlife connectivity measures undertaken by all stakeholders.
- Recognized as an important component, this Assessment is considered in the Governor's Growth and Infrastructure Initiative. Overall, utilization of this Assessment is a strategy that promises to benefit all of Arizona.
- This project has received national recognition as a 2006 Federal Highway Administration *Exemplary Ecosystem Initiative Award* recipient.